

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following is a complete listing of revised claims with a status identifier in parenthesis.

Listing of Claims

1-22. (Cancelled)

23. (Currently Amended) A networked sound masking system, comprising:
a communication network;
a plurality of sound masking units, each sound masking unit connected to the communication network, each sound masking unit configured to selectively output a signal from at least one of a plurality of output signal channels carried over the communication network based on a control signal carried over a control signal channel of the communication network; and
a control unit configured to selectively output at least one sound masking signal on the plurality of output signal channels of the communication network, and the control unit configured to generate the control signal and output the control signal on the control signal channel of a communication network;
at least some of the sound masking units being responsive to a masking volume signal, and at least some of the sound masking units being responsive to a masking frequency signal;

the control unit being configured to generate the masking volume signal for controlling a volume characteristic of the sound masking signal; and
the control unit being configured to generate the masking frequency signal for controlling a frequency characteristic of the sound masking signal.

24. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, wherein the control unit is configured to receive at least one paging signal, and output the paging signal on one of the plurality of output signal channels.

25. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 24, wherein the control unit is configured to selectively combine a sound masking signal and a paging signal, and output the combined signal on one of the plurality of output signal channels.

26. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, wherein the control unit is configured to receive a plurality of the sound masking signals, and output the plurality of sound masking signals on different ones of the plurality of output signal channels.

27. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, wherein the control unit is configured to generate the control signal to identify at least one of the sound masking units and to indicate from which of the output signal channels the identified sound masking unit is to obtain a signal for output.

28. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, wherein the plurality of sound masking units are connected in a series in the communication network.

29. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 28, wherein each of the plurality of sound masking units includes a first interface and a second interface, the first interface interfacing with an upstream side of the communication network, and the second interfacing with a downstream side of the communication network, the upstream side being closer to the control unit and the downstream side being further from the control unit.

30. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, wherein the control unit generates the control signal and populates the plurality of output signal channels such that the plurality of sound masking units are associated with a plurality of sound masking zones, each sound masking unit is associated with one of the plurality of sound masking zones, and the sound masking units provide sound masking for the associated sound masking zone independently of the other sound masking zones.

31. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 30, wherein the control unit populates the plurality of output signal channels such that the sound masking units associated with each sound masking zone provide sound masking tailored to suppress sound in the associated sound masking zone.

32. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 30, wherein a number of the plurality of sound masking units is different from a number of the plurality of sound masking zones.

33. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23 wherein the control unit includes an address generator for assigning addresses to the sound masking units.

34. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the address generator comprises a component for generating a logical address for each of the sound masking units, and the logical address being derived from an identifier associated with each of the sound masking units.

35. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 24, wherein each of the sound masking units includes a first control component and a second control component, the first control component being selectively responsive to the ~~control signals for controlling characteristics~~ the masking volume signal and the masking frequency signal for controlling the volume characteristic and the frequency characteristic, respectively, of the sound masking signal, and the second control component being selectively responsive to a paging volume signal ~~the control signals for controlling characteristics~~ the volume of the paging signal.

36. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 35, wherein each sound masking unit includes a demultiplexer for demultiplexing a combined signal obtained from one of the output signal channels into a paging signal and a sound masking signal and for sending the paging signal to the second control component and the sound masking signal to the first control component.

37. (Cancelled)

38. (Cancelled)

39. (Cancelled)

40. (Cancelled)

41. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 23, further comprising:

 a remote control unit configured to send adjustment signals remotely;

and wherein

 the control unit is configured to receive the adjustment signals and generate the control signals based on the received adjustment signals.

42. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 41, wherein the remote control unit is configured to receive sound measurements and generate the adjustment signals based on the received sound measurements.

43. (New) The system of claim 23, wherein the control unit is configured to generate a plurality of the sound masking signals, and output the plurality of sound masking signals on different ones of the plurality of output signal channels.

44. (New) A networked sound masking system, said sound masking system comprising:

a communication network;
a plurality of sound masking units, some of said sound masking units including a communication interface for coupling said sound masking units to said communication network for receiving signals on said communication network including a sound masking signal, a masking volume signal and a masking frequency signal, and said some of the sound masking units including a processor for outputting said sound masking signal, and said processor including a component responsive to said masking volume signal for controlling the volume of said sound masking signal and a component responsive to said masking frequency signal for controlling the frequency of said sound masking signal;

a control unit configured to output said sound masking signal on said communication network, and said control unit being configured to output said masking volume signal on said communication network, and said control unit being configured to output said masking frequency signal on said communication network.

45. (New) The system of claim 44, wherein said control unit is configured to output a paging signal on said communication network, and said control unit is configured to output a paging volume signal on said communication network, and said control unit is configured to output a paging frequency signal on said communication network.

46. (New) The system of claim 45, wherein said plurality of sound masking units are associated with a plurality of sound masking zones, each of said sound masking units being associated with one of said plurality of sound masking zones, and said sound masking units providing sound masking for said associated sound masking zone independently of said other sound masking zones.

47. (New) The system of claim 46, wherein said sound masking units associated with each of said sound masking zones provide a sound masking output tailored for said associated sound masking zone and said sound

masking output being based on said masking volume and said masking frequency signals.

48. (New) The system of claim 44, further comprising a plurality of zones, and one or more of said sound masking units being associated with one or more of said zones.

49. (New) The system of claim 48, wherein said zones include one or more of a sound masking zone, a timer zone, and a keypad zone.

50. (New) The system of claim 45, wherein said plurality of sound masking units are associated with a plurality of paging zones, each of said sound masking units being associated with one of said plurality of paging zones, and said sound masking units providing paging for said associated paging zone independently of said other paging zones.

51. (New) The system of claim 45, wherein said zones include one or more of a sound masking zone, a paging zone, a timer zone, and a keypad zone.

52. (New) A method for selectively controlling a plurality of sound masking units, said plurality of sound masking units being configured in a control communication network and having an interface for receiving a sound masking

signal and a plurality of control commands over said control communication network, said method comprising the steps of:

monitoring said control communication network and receiving the sound masking signal or one or more of the plurality of control commands addressed to one of said sound masking units;

outputting the received sound masking signal at the addressed sound masking unit;

controlling characteristics of the sound masking signal based on the one or more control commands received at the sound masking unit.

53. (New) The method of claim 52, wherein the plurality of control commands includes a sound masking volume command.

54. (New) The method of claim 53, wherein the plurality of control commands includes a sound masking frequency command.

55. (New) The method of claim 54, further including the step of configuring a plurality of said sound masking units into one or more zones, and controlling said sound masking units for said corresponding sound masking zones to generate sound masking signal outputs independently of said other sound masking zones.

56. (New) The method of claim 55, wherein said step of controlling comprises transmitting said sound masking volume command and said sound masking frequency command to said plurality of sound masking units associated with each of said sound masking zones using address information.

57. (New) A networkable sound masking device comprising:
an interface for interfacing to a network;
a controller for receiving a sound masking signal and one or more control signals from said interface, said one or more control signals being intended for the networkable sound masking device and said one or more control signals comprising a masking volume signal or a masking frequency signal;
an output for outputting said sound masking signal; and
said sound masking signal being responsive to said masking volume signal or said masking frequency signal;

58. (New) The networkable sound masking device of claim 57, wherein said interface includes an address component for recognizing said sound masking signal and said one or more control signals intended for the networkable sound masking device.

59. (New) The networkable sound masking device of claim 57, wherein said output comprises a volume control component and said controller including a

component for controlling said volume control component in response to said masking volume signal.

60. (New) The networkable sound masking device of claim 57, wherein said output comprises a frequency control component and said controller including a component for controlling said frequency control component in response to said masking frequency signal.

61. (New) The networkable sound masking device of claim 60, wherein said output comprises a volume control component and said controller including a component for controlling said volume control component in response to said masking volume signal.

62. (New) A sound masking system for controlling the ambient noise in a physical environment, said sound masking system comprising:

 a communication network for said physical environment;
 a plurality of sound masking units, at least some of said sound masking units including a communication interface for coupling to said communication network for receiving a sound masking signal and one or more control signals over said communication network including a masking volume signal and a masking frequency signal, and said sound masking signal being responsive to said masking volume signal and said sound masking frequency signal;

a control unit configured to output said sound masking signal and to generate said one or more control signals including said masking volume signal and said masking frequency signal, and said control unit having a communication interface for coupling to said communication network for transmitting said one or more control signals to selectively control operation of said plurality of sound masking units;

a plurality of zones, and one or more of said sound masking units being associated with one or more of said zones.

63. (New) The sound masking system of claim 62, wherein said zones include one or more of a sound masking zone, a timer zone, and a keypad zone.